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ABSTRACT

This paper describes Project LINC (Living Independently through Neighborhood Cooperation), a model of service delivery that responds to the needs of the frail elderly on a neighborhood basis. The organization of Project LINC is explained, based on four components, i.e.,: (1) intergenerational helping networks; (2) exchange bank of skills and services; (3) a volunteer corps of residents; and (4) co-sponsorship. Issues and outcomes which have developed during the 18 months that LINC has been in operation are discussed. Difficulties encountered in forming intergenerational networks and exchange banks are presented, including problems resulting from the entry of more young and middle-aged women into the work force and their subsequent unavailability for daytime services, and from the elderly adult's strong desire to remain self-sufficient. On-going research on the LINC model is described, the purpose of which is to determine the viability of neighbors as a support system for the elderly. (NRB)

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# ARE NEIGHBORS A VIABLE SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE FRAIL ELDERLY?

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There has always been grave concern that elderly persons not be prematurely institutionalized because they are unable to get the kind of help they need to enable them to cope with the tasks of daily living. If that help were to be available it would have to be provided on a neighborhood basis, because as we know, as people get older they tend to confine themselves, more and more, to their immediate community.

Project LINC, which is an acronym for LIVING INDEPENDENTLY through NEIGHBORHOOD COOPERATION, was designed as a model of service delivery that could respond to the needs of the frail elderly on a neighborhood basis. The model is based on the recognition that any such system would have to be acceptable to the value preferences of today's elderly generation. First, it was recognized that this generation would find it less threatening to their dignity to accept help from their neighbors, rather than from a service agency. Second, if services were exchanged on a neighbor-to-neighbor basis, the elderly residents would themselves be able to provide services, as well as receive them. This would insure that the means would be available for them to preserve their sense of self-sufficiency, which is so important to them.

With these considerations in mind, Project LINC was organized based on four key components:

1. <u>INTERGENERATIONAL HELPING NETWORKS</u> - these networks are composed of residents of all ages who live in a target area and thus share a common neighborhood.

2. EXCHANGE BANK OF SKILLS AND SERVICES - the bank is composed of residents who volunteer the use of their skills, or agree to provide a specific service to their neighbors. Residents are both donors, as well as recipients of services.
3. A VOLUNTEER CORPS OF RESIDENTS - who serve as LINC volunteers, working in the office answering the phones, doing mailings, matching requ ests for services with appropriate providers, and doing door-to-door work to inform neighbors about the project.
4. CO-SPONSORSHIP- enables responding to requests for services that go beyond the help that a neighbor can provide. These requests are referred to the co-sponsoring organization, a Multipurpose Senior Center. Here the intervention requires the expertise of service agencies rather than that of informal helping networks.

Keeping in mind these four key components, I would like to discuss some of the unexpected outcomes of this project as they relate to the question - ARE NEIGHBORS A VIABLE SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE ELDERLY? You will find statistics describing characteristics of the participants and types of services exchanged, attached to the report that will be distributed at the end of this session.

LINC has been in operation for a year and an half and from our experiences to date, some provocative issues have emerged.

1. As I mentioned, one of the four key components of the project is the INTERGENERATIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED NETWORKS. It was anticipated that younger and middle-aged persons would be available during the day to provide services to the frail elderly. In exchange, they would receive help with temporary child care; mending; vacation assistance, etc.

WHAT WE FOUND - Younger and middle-aged women were no longer at home and available during the day. The statistic that 50% or more of the women are in the work force struck home as a shocking reality. The problem is exacerbated when services requested must be delivered on a week-day, and during day-time hours, when few younger neighbors are available. In fact, in this community, neither the elementary school nor the high school have enough parents available during the day to form a PTA. In lieu they have an executive committee of 6 to 8 mothers who handle the functions, previously shared by many.

IMPLICATIONS - It appears that the neighbors who are more readily available are the young-old, who, despite the limitations on their time, for many of them are taking care of their own elderly parents, do manage to provide services from time to time. However, the goal of/an intergenerational model may not be realizable. creating

2. Another unexpected outcome resulted from experiences related to the formation of the NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS. It was expected that daytime network meetings would bring together younger and older neighbors, and that those who attended would contact their neighbors who worked during the day.

WHAT WE FOUND - The three networks that were organized were composed almost entirely of elderly, who did not attend regularly, because of ill health. In addition, those who attended objected to meeting in small groups, expressing a preference for meetings that would provide more social stimulation. Subsequently larger monthly meetings replaced smaller ones, and the total attendance increased. And as a means of involving those who worked, evening meetings were held during the five daylight savings months of the year. However, it was essential that neighbors get to know each other in local networks, which were the foundation of the neighborhood-based exchanges.

With the increase in LINC participants to 220, smaller networks have been reconstituted, but with a larger group of residents in each. Neighbors are now recruiting neighbors as participants. The large monthly meetings are continuing, as they serve a different function.

IMPLICATIONS - Before local networks can be organized it is necessary to build community trust, based on knowledge of what the project is and how it can benefit residents. Thus, a more successful strategy would have been to start with larger community-wide meetings at which neighborhood issues would be discussed. This would have provided the project with visibility and thus legitimacy, from the start.

3. Another of the objectives of this project is to provide PERSONAL CARE services to frail elderly persons. Personal Care is usually perceived as in-home helping services, such as - preparing a meal; fixing a bed for someone who is ill; providing respite care; helping with household chores; etc.

WHAT WE FOUND - Elderly persons requested such services only in a dire emergency. All other times they preferred doing their in-home chores themselves, no matter how much effort it required. We found that the most frequently requested service was for provision of transportation with an escort. Through this service the elderly could get to medical appointments, do their own shopping, go to the laundry, the bank, and to meetings which they enjoy as a social event, when they feel well enough. Of the 1,206 services that have been exchanged to date, one-third were for transportation with an escort.

IMPLICATIONS - The significance of this service is that it responds to the drive of older persons to remain independent and enables them to do things for themselves, rather than having things done for them. The fact that inflation, with the high cost of gasoline and car repairs, has made people more cautious about the use of their cars, seriously limits the delivery of this service. In designing a neighborhood-based helping model, what is needed is financial support for the provision of this service, transportation with an escort.

4, The last unexpected outcome I will discuss, is the identification of IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS, which hamper the functioning of a system of helping based on neighbors exchanging services.

WHAT WE FOUND - The elderly have a deep-seated fear of becoming dependent, or a burden, or being seen as helpless. This stops them from making their needs known. The fear of rejection, and the feeling that the help they need is for such small things that they can not bother anyone with them, is pervasive. The root of these fears is the deeply ingrained ideology that one must be independent to be worthy, and the inability to recognize that people are truly inter-dependent, rather than independent. This resistance exists despite the fact that the inability to do get certain things "done" upsets them and causes them great discomfort.

IMPLICATIONS - Some of these problems were anticipated in the design of the Exchange Bank. For example, services were not usually provided by neighbors who lived on the same street, so people were not "bothering" their neighbors. However, this method has not sufficiently overcome their resistance. It also appears that participants prefer "repaying" the same person who provided them with a service, rather than their providing a service to someone else in exchange.This raises the whole

issue of whether a barter system, with debits and credits, is more acceptable to elderly people, than an exchange system which they do not perceive as one which permits their returning payment directly.

COMPONENTS - The other two components of the model, the volunteer corps, and co-sponsorship, are unfolding as anticipated. To date 50 different residents have contributed 2,821 hours of volunteer work to Project LINC.

RESEARCH - We are still testing the model to determine whether or not neighbors are a viable support system for the elderly. We shall continue to develop neighborhood networks, and monitor the program as we go along, with the intent of documenting what we have learned. In addition, we will be measuring the impact of the project on a sample of participants. We have collected data from residents, shortly after they entered the program, and we will be administering a post-test during the last year of the project's operation. We are looking for changes in:

1. Perception of the neighborhood
2. Self-reported ability to manage daily tasks
3. Life Satisfaction.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF LINC PARTICIPANTS

(N = 68)

| | PERCENTAGES |
|---|---|
| AGE | |
| Under 60 | 13.2 |
| 60 - 69 | 30.9 |
| 70 - 79 | 35.3 |
| 80 - 91 | 20.6 |
| SEX | |
| Male | 23.5 |
| Female | 76.5 |
| MARITAL STATUS | |
| Married | 36.8 |
| Not Married | 63.2 |
| ANNUAL INCOME, 1980* | |
| Less than $ 9,999 | 39.7 |
| $10,000 - $19,999 | 17.6 |
| $20,000 - $34,999 | 4.4 |
| $35,000 and over | 7.4 |
| TYPE OF DWELLING* | |
| Single family | 26.5 |
| Multiple (2-4 units) | 5.9 |
| Apartment Building | 64.7 |
| LENGTH OF TIME IN NEIGHBORHOOD | |
| Less than 5 years | 23.5 |
| 5 - 9 years | 17.6 |
| 10 - 19 years | 32.4 |
| 20 years and over | 26.5 |
| HOW WELL MANAGING ON A DAY TO DAY BASIS*[a] | |
| Not very well | 16.9 |
| Well enough | 47.5 |
| Very well | 32.2 |
| ENOUGH PEOPLE TO TURN TO FOR HELP*[a] | |
| No | 23.7 |
| Yes | 72.9 |

*Percentages do not add to 100 because of missing data

[a]Question not asked of those under age 60, N = 59

SERVICES EXCHANGED THROUGH OCTOBER 1981

| TYPE OF SERVICE | NUMBER | PERCENT |
|---|---|---|
| Transportation with an Escort | 413 | 34.3 |
| Personal Care* | 72 | 6.0 |
| Telephone Reassurance/Friendly Visiting | 486 | 40.3 |
| Referrals and Coordination | 205 | 17.0 |
| Child Care | 15 | 1.2 |
| Vacation Assistance | 9 | 0.7 |
| Miscellaneous** | 6 | 0.5 |
| TOTAL | 1206 | 100.0 |

*Personal Care includes respite care, meal preparation, shopping for, household tasks and repairs

**Miscellaneous includes letter writing and translations